

Bethlehem Discovery Park

PLANNING PHASE

A free, welcoming park, in its planning phase, where people of every age in the greater Bethlehem area could play, learn and enjoy nature together.

Independent community project

Nothing funded or built yet

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Please read first. Planning phase. An independent plan; nothing is funded or built yet. Not engineered, and not an official project of any agency or institution. Nothing is agreed in writing with the City or any landowner or agency.

What it is

A free, welcoming community park where people of every age can play, learn, enjoy nature and spend time together: inclusive playgrounds, gardens, music and films on the lawn, and hands-on nature and local-history learning.

It would start small: a pilot of about 5–15 acres

Inclusive play, meadow and gardens, a walking loop, a lawn, restrooms, first aid and free water. **No mechanical rides.**

Who it would help

- **Everyone, the same way:** the aim is free grounds, play, water and restrooms every day, the same for all, with no proof of income or benefits.
- **Children of all abilities:** accessible routes, sensory-friendly hours and calm spaces.
- **Learners of every age:** native habitat, rain gardens, and science and history programs schools could join.
- **Teens and neighbors:** youth programs, volunteer roles people choose, and paid, trained staff for safety-critical work.

Where

The study area is the greater Bethlehem / Lehigh Valley area of Pennsylvania. **No landowner has confirmed a site in writing.** Desk research looked at 18 areas near Bethlehem (no parcel records yet); none is confirmed available. Reusing an existing park, facility or under-used land comes first, and every layout is a test fit on a sample parcel (illustrative, not a site plan).

Paying for it honestly

Free is the goal, but something is only free when someone reliably gives or pays for it. Everyday costs (staff, upkeep, insurance, safety, utilities) would need steady money, such as park income and a public partner's budget (none exists yet), **not donations or volunteers.** Gifts could pay for extras such as free programs and events. A typical U.S. park agency earns about a quarter of its operating costs (NRPA 2026 median: 26%).

How to help

This is the listening stage. Ideas, concerns, places we missed and facts we got wrong all help. There is no public contact address yet. Until then, the project website has the plan, the full feasibility brief and its sources.



What could happen next

About 2 yrs, if there is interest

Listen and test: surveys; pop-up “Discovery Days” only where a park owner invites them; form a nonprofit; a market study once it can be paid for. Nothing here is scheduled or funded.

Then

Only if a willing landowner, community support, a market study, a credible operating budget, a reuse-first check (no existing park or facility already meets the need), a written plan to clean up and restore the site if the pilot stops, capital funding and all required permits are in place: plan and build the pilot.

Later

Only if the pilot meets its visitor and cost targets: consider anything larger, such as a carousel and a few small family rides. This may never happen.

Still unknown

- Whether a landowner will agree in writing, and on what terms.
- Floodplain, wetlands, soils, utilities and access at any real site.
- How many people would come, and how often.
- Real costs. A rough placeholder for the pilot is \$4–12 million before land, financing and inflation. It is not an estimate.

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The plan, the brief and its sources